

## Message Text

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41

ACTION NEA-13

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R 240910Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9224

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THE FOLLOWING TEL FROM CALCUTTA SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY  
AND MADRAS DTD 23 JAN IS RPTD:

QUOTE

CALCUTTA 0150

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, EAGR, IN

SUBJ: WEST BENGAL: SOMETHOUGHTS ON PROCUREMENT AND STABILITY

REF: A. NEW DELHI 0196

B. CALCUTTA 0066

C. BOMBAY 0031

1. SUMMARY RICE PROCUREMENT IN WEST BENGAL HAS NOT BEEN  
SERIOUSLY PURSUED BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS,  
IT AND THE PRESS TALK AS THOUGH A SUCCESSFUL PROCUREMENT DRIVE  
WERE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO THE WELFARE AND CONTINUED  
STABILITY IN THIS STATE. THE MARKET PRICE AND THAT OFFERED  
BY THE GOVERNMENT ARE SO DIFFERENT THAT ONLY FORCED PROCURE-  
MENT (LFRIES) COUPLED WITH VIGILANTE EFFORT COULD POSSIBLY  
BRING IN THE QUANTITY OF GRAINS ORIGINALLY CITED AS THE  
MINIMAL TARGET. WE THINK THE CONGRESS MINISTRY HAS DECIDED  
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THAT IT WOULD PREFER TO LIVE WITH THE INCREASINGLY SHRILL

PRESS CRITICISM, THE INCREASING DISPLEASING FOR THE VERY

POOR (IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL BENGAL), THE FURTHER LOSS OF WHAT CREDIBILITY IT STILL ENJOYS AMONGST THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASSES, THAN TAKE ON THE DISTRICT-LEVEL POLITICAL/ECONOMIC POWER BROKERS WHO DOMINATE THE PARTY. THIS MEANS THAT MUCH OF BENGAL'S NOT INSIGNIFICANT RICE CROP (IT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST RICE PRODUCER IN INDIA FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS) WILL GO TO PLACES, E.G., BINNR AND BANGLADESH, WHERE THE PRICE IS HIGH AND THE STATUTORY RATION AREAS WEST BENGAL (CAL-

CUTTA AND THE DIRGAPUR/ASANSOL INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX) WILL BE DEPENDENT ON THE CENTRE FOR SUPPLIES. END SUMMARY.

2. MORNING NEWSPAPERS DAILY REMIND THE READING PUBLIC HOW BADLY THE RICE AND GRAIN PROCUREMENT EFFORT IS GOING. IT HAS BEGUN TO LOOK AS THOUGH THERE IS NO REAL EFFORT. CHIEF MINISTER RAY, AFTER THIRTEEN DAYS IN DELHI, FINALLY RETURNED TO THE STATE ON THE 16TH TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE SITUATION WAS NOT AS BAD AS ALLEGED AND TO ADVISE THE POPULATION THAT IT SHOULD GET OVER ITS "PSYCHOLOGY OF SHORTAGE". OF THOSE WHO NOTICED, AS THEY SPENT ALL DAY IN QUEUES, (OFTEN TO RECEIVE "DUE SLIPS", WHICH ARE I O U S FOR THE FUTURE), AT LEAST A FEW CITIZENS MUST HAVE WONDERED WHAT IT ALL MEANT. BLACK HUMOR? STUPIDITY? UTTER IRRELEVANCE?

PROBABLY NONE

OF THESE; IT PROBABLY MEANT THAT THE LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT FELT SOMETHING MILDLY OPTIMISTIC MUST BE SAID, SO IT WAS. (STIFF UPPER LIP FOR THOSE IN THE QUEUES).

IT WAS, COINCIDENTALLY ACCOMPANIED BY NEWS THAT CPI STATE LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED TO JOIN CONGRESS YOUTH IN UNDERTAKING DEHOARDING OPERATIONS IN STATE. PHOTOS OF DEHOARDING SUCCE-  
SSES HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY APPEARED REGULARLY.

3. WHY THE LACK OF PROCUREMENT SUCCESS? TWO REASONS ARE IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. ONE, THE PRICE DIFFERENTIAL: FARMERS HERE CAN GET ALMOST HALF AS MUCH AGAIN BY SELLING TO PRIVATE DEALERS THAN TO THE GOVERNMENT. TWO, PERHAPS THERE WASN'T A BUMPER CROP AFTER ALL: THUS, IPSO FACTO, PEOPLE HAVE LESS TO SELL AND VIEW THE FUTURE WITH LESS CERTAINTY  
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THAN THEY MIGHT IF THEIR GRAINARIES WERE OVERFLOWING.

4. THIS HAS ALL HAPPENED BEFORE IN WEST BENGAL, IN 1966-67. WHEN THE SERIOUS BIHAR FAMINE TOOK PLACE, THE THEN CONGRESS CHIEF MINISTER (AND CURRENT CONGRESS WARHORSE) P C SEN DECLARED WAR ON THE DISTRICT KULAKS, ANNOUNCED A LEVEY, FORBODE AND ENFORCED THE BAN ON TRANSPORT OF GRAINS FROM DISTRICT TO DISTRICT AND OUT OF THE STATE, HAD THE

POLICE OUT TO ENFORCE COLLECTION EFFORTS ON THE PARTS OF STATE OFFICIALS, ALMOST MET HIS PROCUREMENT GOAL, HELPED THE STATE GET THROUGH A VERY DIFFICULT PERIOD, CAUSED THE CREATION OF THE BANGLA CONGRESS BY THOSE WHOSE GRAINS WERE FORCEABLY PROCURED, AND FINALLY WENT DOWN TO THUNDEROUS ELECTORAL DEFEAT IN 1967 AT THE HANDS OF THE BANGLA CONGRESS/ CPI(M), CPI COALITION. THE PERHAPS SIMPLISTIC BUT NEVERTHE- LESS POWERFUL POLITICAL LESSON THAT SEEMSTO HAVE BEEN LEARNED: NEVER FORCE PROCUREMENT. SIDDARTHA RAY IS NO P C SEN; WE THINK HE HAS DECIDED ON THE FOLLOWING STRATEGY WHICH WE WOULD ASSUME HAS BEEN CLEARED BY MRS. GANDHI, GIVEN THE VERY REAL CONCERN OF THE CENTER THAT POLITICAL STABILITY WOULD BE CONGRESS RULE) PREVAIL IN WEST BENGAL. WITH THE AT LEAST MODERATELY GOOD HARVEST, THE RURAL DISTRICTS WILL MORE OR LESS FEED THEMSELVES. THE CITIES WILL BE DEPENDENT ON DAY- TO-DAY ARRIVALS OF SUPPLIES FROM THE CENTER. THERE WILL BE BREAKDOWNS IN THESE SUPPLIES, BUT IF ONLY FOR A MATTER OF A FEW DAYS THESE WILL BE MANAGEABLE. FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PURPOSES, DEHOARDING DRIVE WILL BE LAUNCHED, INVOLVING THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN SPLASHY, BUT UNCOORDINATED, SWOOPS ON SOME MARWARIS, EVEN SOME DISTRICT LEVEL BENGALIS (WHO HAVE BEEN UNWISE ENOUGH NOT TO INGRATIATE THEMSELVES WITH ONE OR ANOTHER CONGRESS FACTION)--ON THE LINES OF THE MEANINGLESS DEHOARDING DRIVE OF SEPTEMBER WHEN SIX MARWARIS WERE PARADED DOWN CENTRALCALCUTTA, BOUND BY POLICE AND YOUTH CONGRESS, SPAT UPON BY SPECTATORS AND RELEASED WITHOUT CHARGES THREE DAYS LATER. AND, IF THE RURAL AREAS DO FEED THEMSELVES AND IF THE FOOD TRAINS FROM THE WEST DO CONTINUE TO COME TO CALCUTTA, THEN IT WON'T MATTER WHAT THOSE PARSEE SWANTANTRITES IN THE STATESMAN, THOSE BIRLAS AT THE HINDUSTHAN STANDARD/ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA WOULD SAY. THE GHOSHES, GOOD CONGRESSITE BENGALIS, WILL KEEP AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA/ JUGANTAR IN LINE. WHAT ABOUT THE GENERAL, FURTHER LOSS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF CREDIBILITY? THAT'S A PROBLEM, BUT EASIER TO LIVE WITH THAN REAL OPPOSITION FROM PEOPLE WHO COUNT. THAOWN BY THE WAY, IS THE GUJARAT LESSON. WHAT A FOOL CHIMANBHAI PATEL WAS TO EARNESTLY TRY TO FORCE PROCUREMENT; LOOK WHAT HE'S BROUGHT LDOWN ON HIS OWN HEAD. P C SEN ALL OVER AGAIN.

5. WE HAVE GONE CONSIDERABLY BEYOND ANYTHING FOR WHICH WE HAVE FACTS IN THE ABOVE. IF IT SEEMS UNUSUALLY OUT IN LEFT FIELD, DISMISS IT. IF IT SEEMS POSSIBLY TRUE, HOWEVER, AND IF IT'S GOING ON IN MOST OTHER STATES (WHICH WE WOULD GUESS IT IS, WITH DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES/DETAILS, BUT THE SAME BASIC PATTERN), THEN THE FOODGRAIN QUESTION FOR 1974 IS: HAS ENOUGH BEEN COLLECTED FROM THOSE STATES (ARE THERE ANY?) WHERE SERIOUS PROCUREMENT IS GOING ON TO FEED THE REST OF THE COUNTRY? WILL OTHER EFFORTS GET UNDERWAY AT THE CENTER TO OBTAIN

(IMPORT) FOODGRAINS? SERIOUS PEOPLE AROUND HERE WORRY ABOUT  
THAT. BEYOND THAT, THE LONG-TERM QUESTIONS (GOVERNMENT  
CREDIBILITY AND STABILITY, THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR, THE  
LA DLES ON POPULATION GROWTH, AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT,  
ETC.,) ARE SIMPLY TOO MUCH FOR EVEN SERIOUS PEOPLE TO  
CONTEMPLATE.

ROSSELOT  
UNQUOTE  
SCHNEIDER

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## Message Attributes

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